SIDE BY SIDE

16 Insights into Doing Solid Anti-Repression Work

NOTE

"Side by Side" is an act of love and solidarity - intended for everyone on the side of liberatory lives for all. With that aspiration in mind, you're welcome to share it freely and widely.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Lee for hosting all the zines in this series on the Sheer Spite Press website (see back page), and dio cramer (IG @dioishh / diocramer.com), who offered to create the artwork specially for this zine. As dio describes their front and back cover illustrations, "This is a lovers' knot, with black-eyed Susans and hummingbird vines entangled. With the hummingbird vines, I think of the Prairieland defendants recently sentenced to unimaginable decades in prison. With the black-eyed Susans, I think of my friends here in Minnesota, facing brutal state repression. I think of them all connected in struggle, and all of us, interwoven with them. Our resistance is connected, and our fates are tied."

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The impulse behind this zine came from the shock, heartache, and sense of powerlessness that I felt on June 23, 2026, when two federal judges in Texas imposed sadistic sentences in the Prairieland case, ranging from thirty to a hundred years. So many of us felt frozen. Decades – for going to a noise demo outside an ICE detention center, removing someone from a Signal chat, having a printer at home, or simply moving a box of anarchist-oriented zines. Yet we somehow instantly sprang into the best kind of motion that day: checking in on each other, sending messages of solidarity and love, especially to the defendants' families and friends. We then leaped tirelessly and voluntarily back into the many tasks of doing anti-repression "work" that we anarchists do so well.

The day after, when the sentences sunk in a bit and hit me harder, I began thinking about our own responsibility for what was, in part, a movement failure. Maybe the Trump regime would've won anyway – having stacked the deck in its favor in so many ways this time to almost assure victory in falsely and dangerously labeling "antifa" as domestic and global terrorism – a distraction from the actual terror of US-style Christofascism. Yet the fact that almost one-third of the Prairieland defendants decided to cooperate with the state and testify for the prosecution – a strikingly high percent compared to similar high-profile cases like J20 or Stop Cop City – likely played into the outcome, as did a series of other missteps almost from day one.

This isn't intended to point fingers. It's to constructively think and act forward. It's to underscore our duty to continually share with each other the many hard-won lessons and insights that we've accumulated over the years from engaging in anti-repression work and prisoner support – to do better and better each time, such as in lessening harm, refining communal decision-making, strengthening consent, and being increasingly strategic. It's to mentor more folks into this self-organized labor and keep them there, expanding our capacity, and building up our infrastructural and muscle memory. It's to self-reflect on what principles guide us and then pass along solid ethics to those new to this work.

Because collective defense doesn't begin when indictments come down, nor is it a mere toolbox. It's a daily, relational practice, and

that's extra true under authoritarianism, including when the "rule of law" becomes a mere mockery, the heavy glove of state repression is more unpredictable, and humans and indeed life itself are seen as utterly disposable. It's what teaches us, as second nature, to have each others' sides and backs, and at its best, does so in the most caring and nonhierarchical of ways. It's what helps us ward off despair, sustain our resolve, and not feel alone. And so much more.

This zine isn't meant to be comprehensive. Lean on many other aids: distros such as Sprout (sproutdistro.com), podcasts like Outlaw (linktr.ee/outlawpod), and recorded webinars via the National Lawyers Guild (nlg.org/resources/public-webinars). Read "A Tilted Guide to Being a Defendant" (there's a free PDF via files.libcom.org) and the list of resources at itsgoingdown.org/we-must-keep-us-safe-on-repression-trauma-security-culture-and-revolutionary-solidarity. And perhaps most important, seek out in-person wisdom from savvy anti-rep crews, bail funds, and prisoner support efforts in your area.

But it is intended as an inspirational anarchist compass, guiding you, via a sampling of lived experiences, toward what it means to proactively participate with integrity in the messy beautiful, meaningful, critical task of solidarity. Indeed, holding to solidarity - taking a side and then sticking side by side - will be among the messiest things you'll ever do. It demands that we be humble and curious, move with trust and assent, and prioritize tenderness and empathy. It necessitates that we go through the worst with each other while striving to bring out the best in ourselves and others, such as being there for those facing the wrath of the state even if we are not friends or don't like them, or even if we disagree with the actions they got charged, tried, or imprisoned for. It tests how serious we are about journeying together through anxiety, fear, exhaustion, impossible choices, conflict, trauma, and so much more, and in the process, modeling the social transformation we want to see beyond this prison of a current world - vulnerably, steadfastly, ethically.

Or as bighearted former political prisoner Eric King said when asked for advice by some of us on how to support our beloved friend Des, the Prairieland defendant who got thirty years for the "crime" of zines, "We need to love, love, love, love, love on each other."

-Cindy Barukh Milstein

1

We often hear people talk about security culture online and in person. We hear people say to delete messages or be mindful of what you put into the world. Yet we don't always talk about why. Why can't I talk about this or that action that has already happened? Why can't I tell the cops what they already know, just to get them off my back?

The reason is because the smallest of crumbs can become an entire meal. When I was "on the run," the police clearly knew it was me who had committed the actions across the city. They knew this because friends were posting about it all over Facebook. They were openly joking about my action - the silliness that I did it and silliness that it didn't burn down the office. They were using my name.

When the cops came knocking, asking people if I had committed those acts, people were quick to tell them yes. "The cops already knew it, so it didn't matter." It matters. Having corroborating statements helps them build and confirm the case. Having posts on social media helps them confirm all of their suspicions. The cops need proof to bring to the grand jury. They need proof to convict people. We cannot be the ones giving it to them, doing their job for them.

When the police asked my "friends" if they had seen me, and my "friends" told them exactly where, that gave the police the upper hand in catching me. The cops sounded innocent enough: "Hey, we just need to ask him questions. He's not in trouble or anything. We want to make sure he isn't in trouble." This is how they trick people who aren't prepared or get nervous easily. The police never want information to help people. They want it to crush us.

There is something in prison called "dry snitching." It's where you talk about things that other people have done and it leads to them getting caught up. It's the same in the outside world. If the cops see you posting or hear you talking about things, they can use those conversations to put you in a position where you feel the need to talk, out of fear or self-preservation. "We know you played a part, but we know you didn't do anything serious. Help us know the

whole story so that you and your friends can stay out of prison." These are all traps - deeply impacting me and countless others.

We must be careful. The FBI and local police monitor every single social media post. They have informants in our midst; do not be naive enough to think they don't. Security culture isn't just for yourself; it is for the entire community. That doesn't mean mute yourself or your thoughts. It means be conscious of the consequences. It means be mindful of what you say, and if it could cause you or your comrades problems. It means: "I won't talk without my (or a) lawyer."

I probably would have gotten caught even without the help of the loudmouths, but it would've made the cops job much harder and given me more time to get the fuck out of Kansas City. Don't be the dry snitch or coward who costs your comrades their freedom. Instead, aim toward liberation.

-Eric King

2

When someone faces repression, the instinct is to jump into action. The fundraisers and court support matter, but if that's all we do, we are not fully showing up.

Facing repression is not just a legal crisis, it's psychological warfare. It's the sleepless nights waiting for the other shoe to drop, the fear every time there's a knock at the door, and the isolation of watching people treat you like a cause rather than a person and then disappear when the hot moment passes. It's the grief of losing your sense of safety, your trust in the world, and your ability to imagine a future. The grief, rage, and hopelessness don't all magically disappear when the charges are dropped. They linger in your body, and if no one holds you, it consumes you.

Anti-repression work must go beyond the courtroom and see more than mere cases. What I needed most was people to sit with me in the mess of it all and hold my grief without trying to fix me. Sometimes the most supportive thing you can do is just be present and say, "I see you, I hear you, and I am not going anywhere."

Instead, I got people who showed up for the spectacle, but vanished for the aftermath. I got people who treated me like a symbol and then forgot I was a human being. I got people who moved on to the next urgent thing while I was left to heal alone.

Being a ghost to a movement that once circled around me was truly as painful as the repression itself. So if we're serious about anti-repression work, we have to be there for the person, not just the crisis. Check in after the hearings, after charges are dropped, after everyone moves on. Ask how they're doing and actually listen.

Grief is a collective responsibility. Collectivity is resistance. Feeling is resistance. We have to hang onto each other, not just because it's right, but because it's how we build movements that sustain themselves. If we keep treating people as disposable, if we keep leaving them behind, eventually there will be no one left to fight, and we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

-Sammie Lewis

3

In my experience navigating low-grade state repression, most of the work was about making sure that I was doing the smart thing, not the easy one. And my ability to do that depended directly on my ability to care for myself and let others care for me.

I received a lot of great advice and direction from some amazing lawyers as well as other people knowledgeable about the legal system. And there were definitely times throughout the process when I needed an attorney. Yet I was only able to act on the legal counsel because of the support I received from therapists, bodyworkers, other care workers, and many other people with no legal expertise to speak of. Moreover, every single day, I needed my friends.

If you want to aid someone facing state repression but feel like you don't know how, think about the skills you already have; they are likely needed. If nothing else, you know how to be a friend.

Ask the person you're trying to support what they need, if you know them, or ask someone on their support team, if not. Figure out what you can contribute, and if it's not already on their wish list, offer it to them or their crew anyway. We don't always know everything we need - and they can always say no.

On days when I was spending hours on the phone with lawyers and reviewing legal motions, people were bringing me food. coffee, and cigarettes. People drove me to the airport for my court dates and helped me find appropriate clothing for court. You can learn the ins and outs of the legal stuff if you want to - and that's useful - but so much of fighting repression is care work, and in terms of care, everyone has something to offer.

-SD

4

Keep a pair of shoes by the kitchen window. If you need to leave quickly, the door is not an option.

Keep a few important phone numbers on your body or in your clothes. Memorize the crucial addresses.

Learn how to get out of zip ties, handcuffs, and strong arms.

Keep track of the cars in your neighborhood. A familiar license plate will save you from worry in front of a suspicious vehicle. Get to know your neighbors. Defend your neighbors.

Keep looking for loose planks. Discover hollows and hiding places. Freedom-loving people or their contraband will always need safe havens. Offer your home.

Ask the distant childhood friend who is unconnected to it all to keep your encrypted data safe until it all calms down.

Keep working on your heart. Practice, always practice, ways to defend your mind and your body, to keep them yours. If your heart is free, the ground you are on is liberated territory.

-Tuuli

5

Our support crew came together as expeditiously as it did because the groundwork had been laid long before we ever caught a case. Pep and I had been in the movement for decades when we were indicted, and had each done a fair share of building across the country, and in his case, across the globe. So when people learned of our situation, they were quick to show up. We saw reflected back at us the richest representation of what it meant to be held by a movement we committed our lives to. I recognize that this may not be the place everyone is starting from, so I'd say it's imperative that you skill up, learn your history, and nurture relationships.

Our squad included lawyers, facilitators, writers, artists, fundraisers, and seasoned individuals with well-established ties to political prisoner support work. You don't have to be a professional to get good at something; you just have to want to learn and be willing to grind when necessary. We also had the privilege of conversations with movement elders who not only offered guidance; their wisdom offered comfort. They were our possibility models: There could be an "other side" of this one day. Talk to people who have walked the paths before you. If you don't have direct connection, read the many books and essays they have left us. Open yourself to conversations as well as in-person events and opportunities. The internet can only offer so much, especially when it comes to building deep and lasting bonds that can withstand repression.

The four focus areas of our crew were prison support, legal support, fundraising, and web/media. Within our group, people self-organized based on their skills and areas of interest. Each subgroup would handle the projects related to its area and bring its work back to the large group for feedback, but since Pep and I were the people facing prison time, we had the final say-so in all decision-making.

One key thing that worked in our favor was that Pep and I weren't only codefendants; we were partners in every sense of the word, including legally thanks to a marriage license. I was his primary contact both personally and in our legal meetings as codefendants with a joint defense agreement. If you have codefendants, a joint defense

agreement is a legal document that can support your solidarity efforts when fighting your case together. This also meant that it was my responsibility to make sure he wasn't left out of conversations or decision-making when he wasn't present.

I refused to let Pep be relegated to a victim. We both remained actively engaged in the fight for our freedom, even though he was incarcerated and I was not. The state will do everything it can to make you feel helpless. Remember that you are not, and make sure the person you're supporting is reminded of that always.

Bringing a group of anarchists together as a support committee from across the continent with some distinctly different approaches isn't always easy and won't be without conflicts. We had people leave our group for various reasons, and a friendship was even lost along the way. We were fortunate, however, that even through the tensions, our comrades never lost sight of the true enemy, and chose to graciously decenter themselves and their emotions in our organizing efforts.

The depth and breadth of gratitude held for the people who loved us through this ordeal is hard to convey. What we experienced underscored just how powerful people can be when we expand our capacity for love and struggle. So at the very least, every support committee should start with people who are committed to the labor of loving each other with integrity through intense struggle.

-Krystal

6

In the United States, 45 percent of people have had a sibling, spouse, parent, or child jailed or imprisoned. Your neighbors are likely already doing the invisible, stigmatized work of providing emotional, logistical, and financial care for people inside, often from limited resources.

Movement prisoners learn a lot about surviving inside from the people they are locked up with - from cook-ups to coping mechanisms - and we can learn a lot about supporting our comrades by

building solidarity with community members providing care to their families over the walls and through the bars.

From learning how to navigate convoluted phone systems when advocating for someone's immediate needs to practicing ways to set boundaries when carceral violence creates unmanageable emotional urgency, my experience showing up for family incarcerated for crimes of trauma and survival has informed my anti-repression work.

Exchanging survival strategies is an opportunity to start larger conversations about what the world could look like without prisons. "Call near shift changes, when COs are more likely to give you information" or "writing by hand can help get censored content through because the mailroom clerk is less likely to read cursive" are both practical tips to share with your neighbors and invitations to open a horizon of conversation about resisting state violence.

Prisoner solidarity and abolitionist organizing is work of deep care - the more we connect with the prisoner support work already happening around us, the stronger our movements grow.

-Red

7

"Our comrade was arrested! ... What the fuck do we do now?!"

At a protest, on a street corner, from a home, or from an event ... watching someone get grabbed by the state and hauled away is traumatic as well as demoralizing. But the actions we take from the minute the cops roll in can make a difference for the person and community as we process an arrest. Here are a few tips:

Slow down. Arrests are fast, violent, and overwhelming. People want to do something - anything - to attempt to make things better. The repression agenda will try to make us panic, spiral, spill information, fight one another, and ultimately stop our work for freedom. Take some deep breaths instead and encourage others to do the same.

The arrest process is painfully slow and set up like a trap. No matter where you are, expect hours. In my city, it's typically twenty-four to forty-eight hours from arrest to release on bond (if that's possible). We're limited in what we can do, which feels pretty helpless. Even worse, cases typically drag out for months or years. Conserving energy and staying together is critical, and the first steps happen in the immediacy after an arrest. Our intentional choices and calculated responses can and should become the bane of the statist machine.

Take care of yourselves. Create "shifts" for jail support, checking hotlines, and so on, especially for those closest to the arrested folks. Everyone needs sleep, food, and a shower. Come together if it's safe. Debrief if needed. Take breaks, including from arrest footage.

Tighten up info. Remove comrade(s) from Signal groups and other organizing threads, particularly if their phone was taken (it probably was). If you're present for an arrest, make sure folks remain silent, ask for a lawyer, and have an emergency number or legal line. Avoid asking questions. Once people start talking, it's hard to stop.

Hold off on releasing communiqués, press statements, public-facing fundraisers, and the like, until you can establish consent from the arrestees and consider getting legal advice. Discourage bystanders from posting videos, photos, or names of arrestees without consent and legal advice. And remember that all jail calls are recorded; they will be used in the state's investigations, legal arguments, and court.

Focus on taking good care of arrestees from the beginning, while they're still being held in jail. Make a plan, say, for their vehicles, homes, pets, and people who depend on them for care, reaching out to their emergency contacts (if possible) and striving for consent. Identify and start contacting legal resources; it can take time.

If arrestees are likely to be released on bond, bring food and their medications to the jail. They're unlikely to have dietary or medical needs addressed or met during the first day or so of detention.

Greet them with love, warmth, and calm when they get out.

–Protest Defense Committee, Denver

8

There is no one way to do collective defense, yet it's frequently oversimplified as meaning all codefendants have to do the same thing. Instead, it's a process in which defense teams and committees work together to achieve the best possible outcome for everyone. Noncooperation is the principal requirement for collective defense.

In the Stop Cop City movement's Cobb County 3 case in Georgia, Hannah's defense team felt prepared to go to trial and confident in its ability to win. This was the result of consistent collaboration, having also been prosecuted for RICO charges for years, and a precise assessment of the political and legal landscape. The defense thought it was better to secure an early win in order to disarm the state and expose the attorney general's theory of the case. Unlike the RICO prosecution of sixty-one Stop Cop City codefendants, the Cobb County ones didn't have the benefit of large numbers in their case. And they knew the prosecution was preparing to present its tired narrative of "there was a mob; their fireworks were explosives; they were masked and dressed in black."

Based on this assessment, being tried as a group could have led to a conviction if the jury could be swayed by a sensationalized account. While some well-meaning spectators questioned the strategy behind Hannah going first, saying it was individualistic – versus being tried alongside her codefendants with their weaker cases – her victory was a direct outcome of this decision. This success not only benefited her two codefendants but also all of her codefendants in the Atlanta 61 RICO case who still had unindicted charges. Ultimately, a strong pretrial motions practice won out before even reaching a jury.

Our hope is that this victory will serve as an important reminder that collective defense is not prescriptive or a one-size-fits-all model. If you or your comrades find yourself in a similar situation, please don't shy away from debating the merits of different strategic approaches out of fear of how it will be perceived by outsiders. These moments require us to be creative and brave, leaning into discomfort and challenging each other so as to accomplish our shared goal of winning together, however that may look.

–Hannah Kass and Jess Fuller

9

I can't claim the experiences of folks I know who've spent weeks, months, or years incarcerated, but I did experience a few days of incarceration after a mass arrest at a demonstration. Although I hadn't expected to get arrested, I felt a tremendous sense of calm there in my cell. It wasn't just from my cellmates' good cheer. It was because, a few months prior, I'd witnessed someone else get arrested at a protest. I had seen the community rally around them; I'd seen an ad hoc bail fund spring up; I'd gone with folks to the jail to wait for their release. This community, I knew, was resourceful. Even if I couldn't hear them, I knew there were people outside the walls of the jail, waiting for us. I knew people were calling in, demanding our release. I knew lawyers were being coordinated to visit us.

I share this anecdote not as the focus of this story but rather to communicate my central premise: How we show up for people who are experiencing state repression shapes how we perceive risk. Anti-repression support is a worthy effort in its own right. But we should also remember that everything we do for our incarcerated comrades, we do for ourselves, and we do for future generations that may one day find themselves in a cell or under interrogation.

Some more concrete advice:

- When someone is incarcerated, their friends on the outside become an extension of them. Your imprisoned friend depends on you to operate in the world beyond bars on their behalf. You may be sharing things they've written, sending mail, or checking their email; you may be living out their life for them. (Support committees exist in part to distribute this labor.) You're a source of freedom and resistance to state repression. The support crew is a body responding to signals from the brain. If your incarcerated friend wants you to do something you disagree with, you can tell them you won't or that they'll need to find someone else, but don't commit to doing it and then do something else instead simply because you think it's better for them.

- Look up the rules governing the jail, even ahead of arrest. This can help you know what to advocate for. You may be entitled to pillows, blankets, pens, extra phone calls, and so on, but these may all be things you have to ask for.

- Special meals are typically granted on the basis of religious affiliation or medical need. Seventh-Day Adventists and the Church of Deep Ecology are vegan.

- If you're on a support committee, take the initiative and volunteer for tasks. Chances are no one really knows what they're doing, and even if a few people do, they can't do it all. Shadow people with more experience. Ask people for help or tips in doing what needs to be done.

-Badger

10

As a lawyer working with politically targeted people in the United States, I have long been concerned with the practical force of First Amendment protections for freedom of speech. In the wake of Donald Trump's National Security Presidential Memorandum-7 and the devastating Prairieland verdicts, the already slender tether binding law enforcement to "The Law" frays by the day.

To be clear, the First Amendment still exists. Your right to have zines has not diminished, although printed materials may be used as evidence of some alleged crime. As with any law, the enforcement of constitutional rights depends on the decisions of police and prosecutors - which we can't control or even always anticipate.

The tools for dealing with law enforcement remain the same: Practice security; don't talk to cops or open the door to them without a warrant; and get their contact information so a lawyer can call them. But remember, there is no way to struggle against the state and also reliably avoid state repression. This is because repression is not a consequence of unlawful conduct but rather of being perceived as antagonistic to state power. The appropriate response to state repression, therefore, isn't self-censorship; it's courage.

Courage, however, has limited utility if unaccompanied by strategy. Strategy does not mean concession or de-organizing, paranoia, or ritually donning "good protester" drag. But it is neither strategic nor inspiring to make flippant threats that can be used to justify targeting you and everyone in your community. It's time to embrace sincerity as an organizing principle. We can and should publicly express our grief and anger, identify root causes and propose meaningful solutions, and make abundantly clear how upset we are. We will also do well to be circumspect when we talk about crime.

Specifically, I want to talk about what we say on the internet.

Do you have the right to post insurrectionary fantasies and spicy jokes about guillotines, guns, and sabotage? Acabsolutely. Will the humorless suits at your local FBI field office appreciate your elegant rhetoric or understand your hyperbolic satire? Certainly not - or at least, they will give a convincing display of taking it literally to rationalize anything from door knocks to prosecutions.

Posting serves emotional and political functions, including pointing out the absurdity of the state's outsize reactions to our clearly lawful expressive conduct. And if the Secret Service requests a voluntary interview about your Bluesky posts, I will be first in line to tell them to kick rocks. I would love to see a culture, though, that prioritizes earnestness over posturing, militancy, and sloganeering, which are not only risky but intellectually dishonest too, and importantly, ineffective. If we can't ensure that our speech won't be used against us by the state, at least we can make sure it is in alignment with our ethics and visions. At least we can stand by it wholeheartedly when it is read back to us at the gallows.

If you have an interaction with federal law enforcement and live in the United States, please call us at the National Lawyers Guild's Anti-Repression Hotline at 212-679-2811 for a free, privileged conversation about your rights, risks, and responsibilities, and to be connected to appropriate legal resources in your area. If you live beyond these borders, reach out to the equivalent - if there is one - in your own part of the world.

-Moira Meltzer-Cohen

11

Over the years, I've worked on community defense, political prisoner support, police and prison abolition, and fights for Black, Brown, and queer liberation. Across all of these efforts, I've seen both internal and external forces derail well-intentioned efforts. In my experience, the biggest obstacle by far is how we handle conflict.

A useful way to think about conflict in organizing comes from the "Forest Fire Framework," originally developed by comrades with Resist and Renew. The idea is simple: Conflict is like a fire. Once it starts, it can spread fast and damage the whole group. To prevent and manage it, we need to look not just at the flame but at what in our own environments can fuel, ignite, and feed conflict, which if left unchecked, can cause real devastation.

Practical steps toward this in anti-repression support include:

- Creating community agreements for our support committees that directly address harmful dynamics like racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia. Community agreements should be developed and affirmed by everyone, and create a system of accountability.

- Establishing clear, nonhierarchical decision-making processes that are also easily understood by all, and include ways to proactively encourage healthy debate, transparency, and trust.

- Adopting a consensus-based model. There are many decision-making approaches, and each group should find the best fit for itself. A few key elements are that people actively consent to participate, traditionally oppressed voices are recognized, and all voices are heard before taking an action.

Ultimately, anti-repression work is community work, and conflict is a natural part of any relationship. By understanding its roots and putting thoughtful structures in place, we can reduce harm - within support crews and to those facing state repression - and strengthen the ways we supply one another with solidarity.

-Afrotistic

12

You really can't understand the stress of state interrogation until you experience it firsthand. It's inherently overwhelming, and meant to be. Anyone can wear a "Loose lips, sink ships" T-shirt, but being in a room designed to break you, helpless, and remaining strong in the only way possible - by shutting up - is altogether different.

As someone who's been in the anarchist movement for many years, I've been in this situation multiple times, having to keep my head up and eyes down while repeating, "I have nothing to say to you." I've been a committed comrade when it comes to battling repression, and also understand that if I were to cooperate with police, I'd betray everyone I love and everyone who loves me. And I'd never be able to look myself in the mirror again, having betrayed a life of integrity.

With the extreme heightening of repression and abrasive loosening of our so-called rights, plus the low bar for conviction set by Trump and his followers around the world, it's as critical as ever that our revolutionary practices aim to counter these efforts. We must make cowardice during interrogations, grand juries, visits, and other types of repression a harder choice than betrayal within our communities.

This needs to be a collective endeavor; all of us are responsible. We need to hone our priorities and create bonds worth defending. We need to challenge all toxic behaviors and competitive dynamics, realize there's no room for "scene drama" or hobbyism, and know that the choice to engage in radical circles is a serious one.

We must create movements worth defending. We must productively challenge ourselves to better understand how to share a space of safety worth defending. Maturing our communities to act with a love worthy of loyalty, and producing a character, drive, or bond that will hold us up as the state brings us down, are all not only essential for the self-preservation of our movements and mental health. They are tools to help prevent snitching, cooperation, and infiltration. Our affinity must be deep, never superficial, and help define hearts that demonstrate an integrity that the state is incapable of navigating or breaking.

-Umbra Cybil

13

Letters are a lifeline for those on the inside. They're a glimmer of hope and sense of connection in a world full of isolation. Letters are a form of solidarity nationally and internationally, keeping prisoners connected to movements and communities. They help prisoners connect to support when they are finally freed. And letters are the most important and mandatory step to working toward abolition. We will never be free until all prisoners are freed and we must stay in community with those imprisoned.

Prisoner support is as old as the prison itself. The state aims to hide prisoners and have the world forget about them. We must not let the state force us to lose our humanity and compassion for those who are incarcerated.

Each month (or more), our mutual aid group meets at our local wine and beer bar during "Thirsty Thursdays," when the wine is cheap, the beer even cheaper, and the hot dogs can be made vegan. We prepare a list of political prisoners using resources like the Anarchist Black Cross, Black and Pink network, and Instagram. Our list includes the prisoners' names, addresses, some things they like to write about, and where people can find more information on their case. We provide everything: postcards, stamps, paper, envelopes, and some zines that help guide the writing process. Lately, we've been hosting targeted letter-writing nights for the Prairieland defendants, Filton 4, and others while the state ramps up its repression.

Our prison pen pal nights are filled with love and joy. We share poems with each other so we can write their lines to prisoners. Some folks share the latest celebrity gossip, while others swap their favorite recipes or write about their day. When we provide information on what the prisoners enjoy or want to hear about, we give everyone space to remember that these people are just like us, and have hobbies, loved ones, and things they are missing.

We believe that if we're serious about changing the world, we must not abandon those from our movements who are behind bars.

-Megan Jones

14

Criminal charges against our movements and ideologies are political theater. The state's goal is to quash opposition through scandalous charges, multidefendant indictments, shocking violence, and endless house raids. The objective is not to convict people but rather to scare them into silence and isolation. The process is the punishment. Because of this, our response to these cases must be political.

When the purpose of prosecuting our social movements is to silence and isolate, our response must be to get louder and lean even more into each other. Political defense is stronger when we build brave counternarratives, unapologetic support for defendants, and colorful court presence. We beat the repression through a diversity of tactics: publicizing door knocks and subpoenas; going to the media and hosting public webinars; calling out the ways these prosecutions overreach; and more.

We understand that this can feel counterintuitive when held up against traditional approaches to criminal cases. But these are not traditional prosecutions. They are waged by the state with the goal of not only imprisoning defendants but destroying movements too. Forcing more eyes on the cases and each other keeps us and our movements safer, no matter how much a lawyer tells us that isolating oneself from a political community is "better for the case."

Every move by the state can and should be met with community response. We've seen this be effective in cases we've worked on:

- North Carolina: 24-7 jail and court support during the George Floyd uprisings beat almost every single protest charge.

- South Carolina: A federal grand jury subpoena was defeated via a dramatic public campaign around the person subpoeaned.

- Georgia: The Stop Cop City RICO fell apart thanks to extremely loud and consistent solidarity. After things caught on fire next to a music festival, the immediate response was an unapologetic counternarrative that took over the public's imagination.

In political prosecutions, lawyers and support committees need to move like organizers. When lawyer searching, traditional notions of what makes a strong attorney for the case must be interrogated. Just because a lawyer is highly experienced doesn't mean they will engage in the creative, politically aligned tactics that are required to beat the cases and fortify our movements. A politically aligned attorney who understands the players and movement will often do better than the thirty-years-experienced lawyer who goes to happy hours with the prosecutor. Both of these factors, years of experience and a lawyer's political alignment, should be taken into account when fighting political cases.

Other factors that can be helpful to consider:

- Is the lawyer willing to work together with other defendants' legal teams to build a stronger defense for everyone? Formal or informal joint defense can frequently help all the cases because many brains working together are better than one.

- How often does the lawyer intend to visit or communicate with the defendant? If the defendant wants to cocreate their legal strategy, is the lawyer willing to do that?

- What are the lawyer's thoughts on media? Are they inclined to try to block media or willing to work with (or at least not get in the way of) a political media strategy?

When interviewing possible lawyers, traditional attorneys may describe a movement's interests as in conflict with a defendant's interests. Lawyers who use this language may be signaling that they would walk their client into a cooperating plea deal. Find an attorney who recognizes the sociopolitical context, and that support crews can strengthen defense strategy by explaining or finding helpful evidence that otherwise might not be noticed by the legal team.

What is good for principled codefendants is good for movements. Our goal is to get everybody free now or as soon as possible by fighting and winning inside and outside the courtroom.

–Peoples' Law Collective

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When you stick to anti-rep work over the longer haul with others who do the same, you discover a secret: We can and often do learn, grow, and sweetly innovate from past mistakes. And we should.

Sweetness 1: A codefendant repeatedly couldn't resist drinking too much and pushing other codefendants' boundaries when they shared temporary collective housing in a city they all needed to go to for court hearings (with all costs covered by support committee fund-raisers). Some codefendants threatened to stop supporting them. Knowing how such tensions had broken solidarity in past cases, we spent hours having one-on-one dialogues with the impacted codefendants, including the person themselves, to find a solution, which we did: raise more money to house that person in a hotel, away from partying, and continue to include them in the collective defense.

Sweetness 2: After a big collective-defense win, a codefendant's partner told those of us doing support that we hadn't taken care of them and other families, instead focusing on the defendant needs. A few years later, when another scary case hit, we invited the partner to join us in doing emotional support for the loved ones of those dealing with charges; they and others gladly and ably did just that.

Sweetness 3: In one case, we raised money to allow codefendants to get some therapy while they awaited trials – for years. It was not enough. When another huge case kicked off, we pulled together a list of free or sliding-scale movement-oriented therapists and other caregivers, and connected codefendants to them; we wrote up and shared tried-and-true tools with them on how to cope with stress; folks organized in-person, daylong care clinics, offering a variety of free techniques; and herbalists made and gifted care packets.

Sweetness 4: Without failure, anarchists drop everything in their own lives to become DIY first responders, shoving aside feelings to focus on much-needed logistics. But emotions come out – often doing the state's work of breaking us. I've noticed a palpable shift the past several years, thanks to queer and feminist sensibilities gaining an upper hand: We let ourselves process and cry together too.

–Cindy Barukh Milstein

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To be left of liberal is to be a target; we are all arrestable. In the current landscape of ever-shifting yet hauntingly familiar repression, we must reckon with the realities of incarceration. We may be denied water, human contact, lifesaving meds, mail, or basic hygiene products. We may witness violence, suicide, or biologically hazardous conditions. Forget a decent meal. Assume that anything the cops say is a lie. Your friends didn't rat you out; the police have been spying on you. Your family didn't abandon you; you're being denied contact. The possibilities for misery are endless in a typical US jail.

Mentally prepare, now. Strengthen your resolve to resist the temptations that these terrible conditions present. Understand that a variety of tactics will be used to compel you to cooperate. Being unprepared for the consequences of integrity is not an excuse to abandon your values or compromise your community. Choose silence. There is no redemption for snitches.

If you've never been arrested, it will be better and worse than you imagine. Guards will ignore or harass you, but fellow inmates will teach you the ropes. Your various marginalizations may make you more vulnerable, and you will find your people. You will be more bored than you have ever been, and you will face tedious frustrations designed to break you. You will be OK.

Trust that your friends and the larger political community will come together to meet your needs as best they can. There will be phone zaps to get you meds, vegan meals, or complaint forms; whatever you are denied, we will demand. There will be letter-writing nights to combat your loneliness and isolation. Fundraisers will put money on your books or pay for a lawyer. There will be noise demos to demand your release. Community bail funds will rally to pay your bond, and there will be the most delicious hugs when your feet finally touch grass - and you will touch grass again.

Remind yourself every day that the movement is full of creative, compassionate, determined, and resourceful comrades. Solidarity means you will not be forgotten. Trust us so that we can trust you.

-kez

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